

Combsing Back For Gore

Jeffrey Combs reckons he's got it all sewn up when it comes to girls. You see his screen alter ego is one Dr Herbert West and his 'bit of stuff' he made himself from

well, bits of stuff! Our Matthew Hopkins pulled himself together and bought us these words...

If you're ever in need of medical treatment, the last person you would want to go to would be Doctor Herbert West, a man with cracked spectacles and a mind to match. If you saw the 1985 horror classic, *Re-animator* you'll remember that this misguided medico's main hobby was injecting corpses with a dayglo green serum that brought them kicking and screaming back to life. This understandably caused a great deal of commotion in

the local morgue and the movie faded out with Herbert about to be ripped apart by a horde of re-animated corpses. Rest In Pieces, you might think.

But you can't keep a bad man down and now Herbert is back in the long-awaited *Re-animator 2* which is released by Medusa this month. This time he's looking for a bit of female company. No longer satisfied with 'simply' re-animating the dead, West wants to create new forms of life from



various spare body parts he happens to have knocking about his mad lab, specifically a beautiful woman to be the bride of the Re-animator (the film's original title). Of course what he comes up with is worse than anything you might see on *Blind Date*...

So what does the man himself think of this movie? 'I'm really charged up by it' says Herbert. 'It's very grand,

very serious. It tries to keep the unique philosophical integrity of Herbert West intact. There's a progression here in thought, story and ideas. It's like going from algebra to calculus.' Let's pause for a second to explain that this isn't REALLY Herbert we're talking to, but rather his alter ego, 35 year-old Jeffrey Combs, a man who is as obsessive about his acting career as Herbert is about kick-starting corpses.

Jeffrey came to Los Angeles ten years ago as a struggling young stage actor seeking work in movies. 'And it's been hell ever since!' he says with a

sinister Herbert West chuckle. He started as he meant to go on, with a role in a horror movie called *Frightmare*. 'It was not an awfully good film' he shrugs, 'but a lot of struggling actors run the same gauntlet. Everybody has one or two horror movies in their closet. This was about an old horror actor along the lines of Boris Karloff. He dies and his fan club decide to go and steal his body and throw a party for him with his corpse, which of course comes back to life!' Of course.

After doing some television and theatre work, Jeffrey was offered the role of Herbert West in *Re-animator* but he had no idea at the start that this movie would become

a classic of the horror genre. 'To be honest, it looked like just any another low budget horror flick' he reminisces. 'I read the script and I thought well, alright, I could do with the money, so I'll do this thing. No-one will ever see it anyway - how wrong could I be?'

Jeffrey lays credit for the first movie's success at the door of director Stuart Gordon. 'It was his first film and he brought such a unique outlook, style and sense of fun to it that it couldn't help





the story and character development for the sake of getting a little more goo on the screen!

The box-office failure of *From Beyond* drove Jeffrey temporarily into the clutches of low budget film maestro Fred Olen Ray, who cast him as the hero in *Cyclone* (Entertainment In Video), a low budget thriller about a super-powered motor cycle, and *The Phantom Empire* (Vestron), where he played opposite busty exploitation queen Sybil Danning.

"That was a hoot!" he chuckles. "Fred called me up and said 'Look, I'm putting up my own money and I'm going to make

is: 'Okay, if I can bring back various parts of the dead, and connect them, then we can make an entirely new creature, bigger and better than ever. So we go about stealing body parts a-la Dr Frankenstein and put them together in our lab and create a woman, who is played by Kathleen Kinmont in this truly grotesque make-up.'

The film offers an ambitious array of over-the-top grand guignol make-up and mechanical effects provided by such genre stalwarts as Screaming Mad George and Tony Dublin, and has for the most part already met with the approval of die-hard *Re-animator* fans everywhere. 'Audiences just seem to have a really good time watching it,' says Combs. 'There are a lot of very sick people out there...'

So will we be seeing Herbert West's horrible handiwork in any more screen adventures? 'I would like to think so,' concludes the actor. 'We were talking about how the story of *Re-animator III* should go when we were shooting the second one, but nothing has become tangible yet, no script has been written. I guess they're just waiting to see how this one goes. It would be nice, because I'd like to continue exploring the character of Herbert and how he reacts in different situations. He's not done yet, I don't feel so, anyway...'

to come off like it did. You know, it's really curious because when we were filming it he seemed to be taking it very seriously. I know it was quite ridiculous - the decapitated body carrying the head around and all that - but I always got the sense that that would not be something that audiences would find funny. It was mainstream grand guignol horror, and certainly not 'camp'. But after the film was put together, the 'campy' elements showed themselves, and of course everyone said "that was what we planned all along".

Gordon and Combs went on to work together again on *From Beyond*, a more serious and sombre work that didn't meet with the same level of box-office success. 'The mix was not right' explains the actor. 'A good horror movie has to have interesting characters, a really good story, and the third element nowadays is the special effects. These elements all have to be carefully balanced. In *From Beyond* the balance was weighed too heavily in favour of the special effects. There were scenes that were cut that reduced

this movie, and I'm going to make it in one week because that's all the money that I have." I like challenges, you know? I thought let's try it and see what can be done in a week. I found out the answer: not a lot!

At least these movies actually made it to the video market, while other Combs projects like a Charlie Band picture called *Evil Clergyman* was a casualty of the financial collapse of Band's Empire Pictures and is still sitting on a shelf awaiting completion. A similar thing seems to have happened to another of his movies entitled *Dead Men Walk*, but as this also stars the ubiquitous Wings Hauser it seems a dead cert to turn up on video here sometime or other.

And so to *Re-animator II*, which the actor is far happier to discuss. 'I wouldn't compare it to the first movie' he says. 'It's apples and oranges - a completely different bag of worms. It's more of the Frankenstein, I think. What I like about it is the progression of ideas. In the first one Herbert was just interested in bringing back the dead. In this one the evolution in his thinking

The Second Combsing

Ten copies of Medusa's RE-ANIMATOR 2 to be won

Next time you wake up looking like death spare a thought for Dr Herbert West's creations, after all, they ARE dead! These guy's and (and girl) have had more than just liposuction and the odd surgical tuck, they've been completely rebuilt... just like the bionic man really but without all that glamour. We've got ten copies of the movie that proves gore fiends can get it together the second time around, to give away. You could have a copy stitched up if you can tell us who wrote Frankenstein and when. Entries to; Twice As Nasty Comp., Video World Magazine, PO Box 381, Millharbour, London E14 9TW. Get them in by October 15th, there'll be no second chances.